Appendix C – Biological Evaluation for Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species

I. Wildlife Biological Evaluation

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST - Biological Evaluation

Date: 7 August, 2003
Project Name: Chugach Powder Guides: 5-Year Permit for Heli-skiing
District: Seward and Glacier Ranger Districts
Project Type: Recreational permit
Location: Seward and Glacier Districts.
Project Actions: 13 zones totaling 342,700 acres on the Glacier and Seward Ranger Districts. The season of use would be from approximately December 15 through April 20. Three helicopters would be used and 2,400 client days would be utilized.
Vegetation/Habitat Type: Heli-skiing areas are primarily alpine, rock, snow, and ice.

I. Prior Biological Evaluation				**No**	**Yes**
Prior Project BE: Sensitive Plants	Date:	9-14-1999			X
Prior Project BE: Wildlife	Date:	9-17-1999			X
II. Species and/or Habitat				**No**	**Yes**
2. Previous Species Observation				X	
3. Federally Listed Species Present				X	
4. Habitat For Federally Listed Species Present				X	
5. Sensitive Species Present				X	
6. Habitat For Sensitive Species Present				X	
III. Analysis of Effects				**No**	**Yes**
1. Significant Habitat Alteration				X	
2. Effects Outside Project Area					X
3. Cumulative Effects on Listed Species or Habitat				X	
4. Cumulative Effects on Sensitive Species or Habitat				X	
IV. Determination of Effects				**No**	**Yes**
1. No Affect Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed Species					X
2 May Affect Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed Species				X	
3. May Affect Individual Sensitive Species				X	
4. May Affect Sensitive Species' Population Viability				X	
V. Consultation Requirements				**No**	**Yes**
1. Formal Consultation Required				X	
2. Additional Informal Consultation Required				X	

Based on the findings above and the size and effect of the proposed project, a detailed biological evaluation and further consultation are not required.

Affected Environment

Habitat

- Helicopter flights occur over a wide variety of habitat types. Drop off and heli-skiing primarily occurs above tree line in alpine, rock and snow areas, and on or adjacent to glaciers. The flight path to access various permit units may occur over all types of habitats, including forested, riparian, and coastal areas. The proposed project operations are not expected to encounter several of the species of concern listed in Table 2.

Wildlife

- The **Dusky Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis occidentalis*)** is a Region 10 sensitive species. The breeding distribution is restricted primarily to the Copper River Delta (Campbell et al. 1990). It winters primarily in the Willamette Valley in Oregon, and along the Columbia River in Washington (Cornely et al. 1988, Bartonek et al. 1971). The Dusky Canada goose does not occur in the project area. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to Dusky Canada geese are anticipated.*
- The **Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)** is an endangered species that occurs in all oceans of the world. Humpback whales do not occur in the permit area. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to humpback whales are anticipated*.
- The **Steller's Sea Lion** (***Eumetopias jubatus)*** is a threatened species with centers of abundance and distribution in the Gulf of Alaska and Aleutian Islands. The Steller's sea lion does not occur in the permit area. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to Steller's sea lions are anticipated*.
- **Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator)*** are a Region 10 sensitive species. Trumpeter swans transit the Chugach National Forest during spring and fall migrations. They commonly nest on the Copper River Delta wetlands and are known to nest at Ingram pond (between Ingram Creek and Placer River). Trumpeter swans do not occur within the project area during the proposed operating season. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to trumpeter swans are anticipated.*
- **Black oystercatchers** (***Haematopus bachmani***) occur on the CNF in Prince William Sound. Black Oystercatchers are unlikely to be found within the permit area or under the helicopter flight path. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to black oystercatchers are anticipated.*
- The **Montague Island Tundra Vole** and **Montague Island Hoary Marmot** are endemic to Montague Island, and are not known to occur on the Kenai Peninsula. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to Montague Island mammals are anticipated.*
- **Steller's Eiders** do not breed on the Chugach National Forest. They may winter on the south end of the Kenai Peninsula, but not on the Seward Ranger District (personal communication with Bill Shuster, Seward Ranger District Resource Staff Officer). *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to Steller's eiders are anticipated.*
- The **Sitka black-tailed deer** (***Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis***) is native to the wet coastal rain forests of Southeast Alaska and north-coastal British Columbia. Established populations now also exist near Yakutat, in Prince William Sound, and on Kodiak and Afognak islands. They use alpine and needle leaf habitat during the summer, and old-growth forest below 800 feet elevation during the winter. Loss of winter habitat would be the biggest risk to the Sitka black-tailed deer. Currently the population in Prince William Sound is considered to be at a moderate to high density. In 2003, several were seen as far west as Anchorage. On occasion, individuals in Seward have reported seeing deer along Nash Road, and as far north as Tern Lake. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to Sitka black-tailed deer are anticipated*.
- The **Osprey** (***Pandion haliaeetus***) is a Region 10 sensitive species. The osprey is widely distributed across much of Alaska south of the Brooks Range, but localized in the vicinity of

lakes, large rivers, and coastal bays. Osprey are rare to uncommon throughout Alaska (Palmer 1988) and may only occur within the project area during spring and fall migrations; they are not considered to be winter residents. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to Osprey are anticipated.*

- The **Peale's peregrine falcon** is a Region 10 sensitive species. The Peale's peregrine falcon nests in Alaska along the Pacific coast from southeastern Alaska through the Gulf of Alaska and west to the end of the Aleutian Islands. Nesting habitat in Alaska includes ledges of vertical rocky cliffs in the vicinity of seabird colonies (Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959). There are no known nest sites within the project area. The Peale's peregrine falcon winters from the Queen Charlotte Islands and southwestern British Columbia, south along the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California rarely to northern Baja California. Peale's peregrine falcons do not occur within the project area during the proposed operating season. *Determination of Effect: no adverse impacts to Peale's peregrine falcon are anticipated.*

Discussion of Cumulative Effects

- This project will not cause short or long-term changes to sensitive wildlife habitat as a direct result of the helicopter landings, recreational activities, and overflights associated with this project.
- There should be no adverse cumulative effects on endangered, threatened, or sensitive species due to the absence of direct habitat modification by any helicopter landings or ski activities.

Mitigating measures required for all alternatives

- Helicopter flights will be required to maintain a 1,500 feet vertical and horizontal clearance from whales, sea lions and other marine mammals.
- If any previously undiscovered endangered, threatened or sensitive species are encountered during the implementation of this project, notify the Forest Wildlife Ecologist for consultation and recommendation of appropriate mitigating measures to be enacted.

Conclusion

- The proposed action is not likely to have an adverse effect on vertebrate endangered, threatened or endangered species or their habitats.
- The proposed action should have no impact on sensitive species or their habitats.

II. Biological Evaluation For Sensitive Plants

Pre-Field Review Worksheet for Sensitive Plants - USDA Forest Service, Alaska Region

PROJECT NAME: Commercially Guided Helicopter Skiing

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: A typical day would include dropping clients off on ridge tops, picking them up at the bottom of the runs. They leave the current area once the entire run is tracked, or weather and/or snow conditions indicate time to move on. Number of lands in one area depends on number of clients and number of runs taken. Up to 3 helicopters would be used. The only staging area on National Forest is Mile 62 Gravel Pit, near Granite Creek Campground. Use includes: fuel truck on site, fueling, and loading and unloading clients. No storage will occur. Snow plowing would occur, some done by proponent, most done by DOT or GRD. The season would run from approximately 12/15 – 4/20. The entire project area would be covered in snow and ice during that period.

The proponents will have 1 or 2 cleanup days during the summer. This will involve helicopter landing and cleanup of poles and other debris left at the site.

LOCATION: Glacier/Winner Creek; West, North, and East Twentymile; Placer/Skookum; Grandview; Bench Peak West, North and South; Seattle Creek West, Middle and East; Moose Creek and Moose Creek West; Ptarmigan and Ptarmigan West; Snow River; and Mount Ascension.

SENSITIVE PLANTS KNOWN: Check maps (GIS or hand-made), contact the Regional Botanist, Forest/District Ecologist, and check AKNHP records. Document sources of information. Record the plant's location or distance from the project area:

Species: Location:

Date of records search:

SENSITIVE PLANT HABITAT & SENSITIVE PLANTS SUSPECTED:
A) Obtain habitat information from people familiar with the project area, project proponent, GIS (e.g. soil map units, timber types, channel type covers) aerial photo interpretation, and/or site visits. Highlight or underline methods used.

Highlight or underline the following habitats that are likely to occur in the project area:
coniferous forest, deciduous forest, mixed conifer/deciduous forest, dwarf tree forest, forest edge, tall shrublands, low shrublands, rocky areas, rock outcrops, ridgetops, cliffs, serpentine, calcareous areas, gravel, scree, talus, boulder fields, seeps, wet areas, riparian areas (give channel type, if known), streambanks, waterfalls, lake margins, ponds, shallow freshwater, marshes, swamps, estuaries, sphagnum bogs, fens, heath, subalpine meadows, alpine, area dominated by moss or lichen, dry meadows, moist-wet meadows, upper beach meadows, grasslands, maritime beaches, sandy areas, other (describe here)

B) Using your knowledge of sensitive plant habitat needs, or any other sources, indicate the plants (R-10 sensitive plants listed below) suspected that correspond to the above habitats (highlight or underline them below):

Aphragmus eschscholtzianus	*Papaver alboroseum*
Arnica lessingii ssp. *norbergii*	*Platanthera gracilis*
Botrychium tunux	*Poa laxiflora*
Botrychium yaaxudakeit	*Puccinellia glabra*
Carex lenticularis var. *dolia*	*Puccinellia kamtschatica*
Cirsium edule	*Hymenophyllum wrightii*
Draba kananaskis	*Romanzoffia unalaschcensis*
Glyceria leptostachya	*Senecio moresbiensis*
Isoetes truncata	*Stellaria ruscifolia* ssp. *aleutica*
Ligusticum calderi	

DETERMINATIONS POSSIBLE PRIOR TO FIELD SURVEY

1) Does the evidence indicate that no sensitive plants or possible habitat exists within the project area (e.g. parking lot)?

   □ **YES**. Explain exactly why (insert here) and sign and date this document. BE is complete.
   X **NO**. Go on to question 2.

2) Based on knowledge of the proposed project and the species involved, can a "no impact" statement be made?

   X **YES**. Explain exactly why and sign and date this document. BE is complete.

   The proposed activity would occur over snow and ice covered surfaces. Snow and ice cover would protect all potential sensitive plants and habitats from proposed activities. The proposed cleanup of debris during the summer would also have no impact on any sensitive species or habitat because no ground disturbance is anticipated with these activities.

   □ **NO**. Go on to question 3.

3) Based on knowledge of the project and the species involved, can a statement be made that "implementation of the proposed project, including mitigation measures, would not contribute to a loss of viability of the species or cause the species to move toward federal listing?"

   □ **YES**. Explain exactly why (insert here) and explain the mitigation measures that are part of the proposed project.
   Sign and date this document. BE is complete.

☐ **CANNOT BE DETERMINED WITH AVAILABLE INFORMATION**. Go to the Field Reconnaissance step of the BE process. Make survey recommendations (insert here), check one of the boxes below, sign and date this document.

☐ Field surveys are recommended to be performed during the following months in order to identify all of the species indicated above that could potentially occur within the project area. Document using personal knowledge and the "identifiable times" table in BE appendices to determine which months are ideal for surveys (insert here):

☐ Field surveys are not recommended for the following reasons: (insert here)

Prepared By: /s/ Betty Charnon Date: 7/8/03

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